



Algeria and Palestine in the Poetry of Ibn al-Shāṭi': Between Poetic Twinhood and the Experience of Struggle

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Abstract

This paper examines the presence of Algeria and Palestine in the poetry of Ibn al-Shāṭi' through a lens that brings together poetic twinhood and the lived experience of struggle. The poet gave voice to his sincere national commitment by portraying the Algerian Revolution as a symbol of liberation and triumph, and the Palestinian cause as an open wound embodying both tragedy and steadfastness. This twinhood manifests in the unity of the poetic lexicon, where words such as martyrdom, land, blood, and resistance recur throughout. It also appears in the symbolic linking of the two causes, the victory of Algeria as the hope of Palestine, and the steadfastness of Palestine as the continuation of Algeria's revolution. Ibn al-Shāṭi''s poems are distinguished by a clear balance between political commitment and artistic beauty. He maintained a refined poetic language built on symbol, image, and metaphor, making his resistance poetry a sophisticated artistic expression of Arab collective consciousness and its aspirations for freedom.

Keywords: Ibn al-Shāṭi', Resistance Poetry, Poetic Twinhood, Algeria and Palestine, Political Commitment.

Introduction

Modern Arab history has known pivotal moments of struggle, embodied in liberation revolutions against colonialism, most notably the glorious Algerian Revolution, alongside the ongoing Palestinian resistance against Zionist occupation. Both causes have occupied a central place in the Arab conscience, finding expression across various forms of artistic and literary creation, with poetry at the forefront.

Among the poetic voices that spoke honestly and powerfully on behalf of this collective consciousness stands the poet Ibn al-Shāṭi', in whose poetic experience the Algerian and Palestinian causes converged into a single line of struggle, expressed through his nationalist vision and commitment to resistance poetry.

I. The Literary Biography of Ibn al-Shāṭi': Struggle and Creativity

Ibn al-Shāṭi', whose real name was Ismā'īl Ibrāhīm Shatat, was born on May 28, 1939, in the village of al-Jusayr, situated between Hebron and Gaza, into an established and well-off Palestinian family.¹

From a young age he joined the ranks of the Palestinian national movement, and despite difficult social and political circumstances showed exceptional academic talent. In 1957 he earned his baccalaureate with distinction, channeling his early poetic gift into the service of the Palestinian cause and the broader concerns of the Arab nation.

In 1970 he left the Arab East and settled in Algeria, the land of a million and a half martyrs, where broad horizons opened before him in literature, journalism, and media. He worked in television, radio, and print journalism. Among his most notable achievements was founding the 'Literary Mirrors' page in Al-Mujāhid Weekly magazine, which grew into a literary school that produced dozens of creative writers and poets from Algeria.

He also taught in several Algerian provinces, moving between Oran and Mascara in the west, Algiers, Tizi Ouzou, and Medea in the center, and Jijel in the east, contributing to the formation of thousands of students across various disciplines.

Ibn al-Shāṭi' is considered among the most prolific of Arab poets, having written tens of thousands of lines of verse, a number without precedent in ancient or modern times. He gathered his output into 69 poetry collections, of which 11 were published while 58 remain unpublished manuscripts. He also produced numerous prose works, literary and political studies, and school and university textbooks, including his reference work on grammar, *Al-Shāmil al-Muyassar fī Qawā'id al-Lughā al-'Arabiyya* [The Simplified Comprehensive Guide to Arabic Grammar], in three volumes.

Ibn al-Shāṭi' passed away on the night of April 29–30, 2008, while returning from Syria to the city of Jijel. He was buried in the Likiti cemetery on May 1, 2008, leaving behind an enduring literary and poetic legacy.

II. The Thematic and Aesthetic Structure of The Incomplete Collection (Volume One)

This collection holds a prominent place in Ibn al-Shāṭi's creative trajectory, representing a stage of poetic maturity in which his artistic experience and the depth of his struggle are on full display. The collection comprises two complementary poetry sets, unified in vision and content: *Abjadiyyat al-manfā wa-al-bunduqiyya* (The ABCs of Exile and the Rifle) and *I'tirāfāt fī 'izz al-ẓahīra* (Confessions at High Noon).

The first set reflects the duality of exile and resistance. Here, exile is not merely a geographical displacement but an existential condition carrying the meanings of uprooting and longing for the homeland, while the rifle symbolizes the will to fight and the act of liberation. The second set, Confessions at High Noon, represents a wider emotional space, blending introspection with engagement with the nation's burdens, in an unflinching encounter with reality where the heat of conviction meets the clarity of vision.

The first edition of this work was published by Dār al-Awṭān in 2009, affirming the poet's continued commitment to the line of resistance poetry and his ability to balance militant engagement

with aesthetic construction, through texts that rely on symbol and dense imagery, drawing on collective memory as a defense against forgetting.

The title *The ABCs of Exile and the Rifle* carries a dual meaning: 'alphabet' (*abjadiyya*) evokes beginnings and foundations upon which language and identity are built, while 'exile' embodies the experience of forced displacement with all its wounds and longings. 'The rifle' completes the meaning as a symbol of resistance and armed struggle, together suggesting that awareness of identity is only fulfilled through the act of fighting.

Confessions at High Noon, for its part, carries a symbolic dimension tied to clarity and exposure. 'High noon' is the hour when light breaks fully and shadows vanish, reflecting the frankness of the stance and the transparency of disclosure. The word 'confessions' points to an act of individual and collective self-revelation, where the poet's individual voice intersects with the voice of the nation in facing hard truths, with nothing hidden or softened.

In this context, the title is not merely a label, it is a semantic key that unlocks the text's dimensions. As Murtaḍ (1995) observed, 'A small text deals with a large text, engaging with it and opening the path to its readability, for it reveals what the writer wished to convey to his reader' (p. 277).² This applies fully to the titles of both sets in this collection, which form a textual threshold, revealing from the very first moment the presence of exile, resistance, and frank disclosure as pillars of Ibn al-Shāṭi's poetic experience.

III. The Dimension of Struggle in the Poetry of Ibn al-Shāṭi

Ibn al-Shāṭi's poetry belongs to the tradition of resistance literature, one of those deeply human literary forms found in every people who have long suffered under oppression, and who are driven by that suffering to reject injustice and refuse submission. Accordingly, this literature typically aligns itself with causes of liberation and takes the side of the oppressed, as is the case in the ongoing Palestinian experience under occupation or the Algerian experience against French colonialism (Al-Aṣṭa, 2008, p. 9).³

The themes of this literature revolve around values such as heroism, self-sacrifice, steadfastness, defiance, revolution, martyrdom, attachment to the land, and reconstruction. It intersects with other literary forms, literature of return, prison literature, exile literature, and writing about estrangement from the homeland, and makes use of artistic tools to document events and realities (Al-Aṣṭa, 2008, p. 9).⁴

From this framework, a careful reading of Ibn al-Shāṭi's poetry reveals a sincere commitment to the great causes of struggle in the Arab world, first among them the Algerian and Palestinian causes. These two did not appear in his poetry as mere political subjects, but as an organic part of his intellectual and emotional vision, and indeed of his poetic experience itself.

In the poet's consciousness, the Algerian Revolution was a shining point of light, a model of the successful Arab revolution, an experience that freed collective will from the grip of colonialism. As Kanafānī (1968) noted, the Algerian Revolution 'ignited a unique kind of poetry in occupied Palestine and kindled impulses worthy of deep reflection' (p. 72).⁵

Through his poetry, we see how Algeria became a symbol of heroism and sacrifice, manifested in the glorification of martyrs, the evocation of great sacrifices, and the affirmation of popular steadfastness. In the poem 'The Collective Self... and the Utmost of Love,' he writes:

*We awoke to the gunfire of the brave men
In the mountains of the Aurès, despite all adversity!...⁶*

*It was Tishrin⁷
upright and whole,
Defying the savagery of the wretched!⁸*

As for Palestine, it was for Ibn al-Shāṭi' the unceasing wound, the violated nation, the stolen right. He depicted the suffering of its people, condemned the occupation, and stood firmly beside resistance as an irreversible choice.

*You summon the depths of my longing
And renew the blood of steadfastness...!!?⁹*

*On your trigger, O passion...
...the spirit of the martyr blazed forth...??¹⁰*

In another poem, he writes:¹¹

*My body is my weapon, and the distance
Is a joyful charge... and a 'No!'
No... they shall not pass! The revolutionaries swore it
And dignity took root.*

What distinguishes his poetry is that he never separated the two causes, he bound them together within a comprehensive vision of struggle grounded in unity of fate and unity of suffering. In his eyes, French colonialism in Algeria and Zionist occupation in Palestine were two faces of the same tragedy, where Arab pain converges and the battle for existence and identity takes shape.

Here, a shared vocabulary of struggle crystallizes across his poems, built on words such as blood, martyr, land, freedom, revolution, resistance, victory, occupation, dignity, Arabism, and steadfastness, a lexicon that reflects the mobilizing nature of his poetry and affirms his alignment with the community's collective consciousness and its defining concerns.

His experience was not a mere poetic exchange or sentimental solidarity, it came from a deep conviction that poetry is a tool of resistance, and from his belief in the role of the word in spurring action and building collective awareness. Ibn al-Shāṭi' sought to make his voice a servant of oppressed peoples, and his conscience a companion to freedom and justice.

This unifying vision is evident in his rendering of both causes within a single structure, where Algeria's victory is evoked as a herald of Palestine's awakening, and the steadfastness of the Palestinians is recalled as an extension of the spirit of the Algerian Revolution.

The following verse draws an explicit link between Algeria and Palestine, casting November's revolution as a revolutionary beacon that inspired the Palestinians and all free people, celebrating it as 'the vanguard' in the march of Arab liberation (Ibn al-Shāṭi', 2009, p. 216):¹²

*And if November is always at the vanguard,
Then on the braid of its light we lead the way!!*

He also writes (Ibn al-Shāṭi', 2009, p. 87):¹³

*We rose from the rubble... and we had
An appointment with the High Galilee!!*

The word 'Galilee' here works on two levels, first as a quality of loftiness and glory, and second (contextually intended) as a reference to the Galilee region in Palestine, opening the poem's horizon toward the Palestinian cause. The verse suggests that the poet is speaking of a liberation yet to come for Palestine, just as it came for Algeria before, through the symbolism of meeting at 'the appointed hour of victory.'

In the context of a poem celebrating the November Revolution, the verse links Algeria's triumph to Palestine's aspiration toward it as a model, making this line also a marker of the fighting bond between the two.

On the same page, he writes:

*History repeated a clear and manifest conquest,
And returned the forebears within their descendants!!*

The verse points to the recurring nature of victory and liberation in history, where new generations (the descendants) renew the glories of the fathers (the forebears). The phrase 'a clear and manifest conquest' (faṭḥan mubīnan) invokes a great victory comparable to the early Islamic conquests, lending the Palestinian and Algerian battles a shared civilizational and historical depth.

What gives these texts their artistic and aesthetic depth is the interweaving of individual emotional experience with collective national concern; the poem becomes a living emotional document speaking on behalf of a nation that fights and waits. It does not narrate events; it ignites memory, stirs hope, and lays the groundwork for a genuinely resistant poetic discourse.

Ibn al-Shāṭi' presented in his poetry a refined model of committed struggle, he was not a neutral observer before the trials of peoples; he made his pen a platform for resistance and his poem a voice for freedom. This was clearly reflected in his engagement with both the Algerian and

Palestinian causes, which together formed for him a driving force of collective consciousness, and the source of a poetic and historical twinhood between two peoples who share in suffering and hope for liberation.

4. The Symbolic Twinhood Between Algeria and Palestine

Ibn al-Shāṭi' tends throughout his poetic experience to unify the Arab causes in a single, all-embracing discourse of struggle, one in which events intersect and symbols converge, so that Algeria and Palestine do not appear as two separate situations, but as two voices from a single wound and two pulses in the body of one nation.

In his poems, we notice that he does not separate the resistance in Algeria from the resistance in Palestine, he connects them through implicit and sometimes explicit allusions, so that Algeria becomes an open horizon for Palestine, and Palestine an extension of the spirit of a rebellious Algeria. This twinhood is not only political but symbolic and aesthetic, upon which the prospect of comprehensive Arab liberation is built.

This twinhood is reflected in the striking recurrence of shared vocabulary in both contexts, words like land, fire, martyrdom, wound, child, soldier, flag, freedom, catastrophe (nakba), and resurrection. These words melt into a single crucible, producing expressive poetry charged with emotion and conviction.

The poet grants Algeria an inspirational dimension, it is the homeland that prevailed, the revolution that succeeded, the hope made real before oppressed peoples. From this position, Algeria in his poetry assumes the role of Palestine's 'elder sister', the symbol that breathes into the Palestinian soul the spirit of resistance and the determination to reach victory.

In one of his poems, he writes (Ibn al-Shāṭi', 2009, p. 88):¹⁴

*It diminished the stature of the enemy and drove
The banner of victory into the heights of glory!!*

This verse symbolizes triumph over the enemy and the raising of the victory banner high. 'Diminished the stature of the enemy' points to the breaking of the occupation's awe, whether French in Algeria or Zionist in Palestine; 'the banner of victory was driven' affirms that victory is possible and was achieved, raised on 'the heights of glory,' meaning the summits of history and greatness.

Ibn al-Shāṭi' also connects the two nations through the symbolism of a single body that aches in one place and cries out in another, every wound in Algeria is a hemorrhage in Palestine, and every Palestinian martyr is an extension of an Algerian martyr.

He says (Ibn al-Shāṭi', 2009, p. 89):¹⁵

*Sweep away the silence and the bridges, and be
The Arab nation in the conscience of jihad!!..*

The verse carries a powerful sense of the unity of blood and fate among Algeria, Palestine, and the wider Arab world. 'Sweep away the silence and the bridges' is a call to revolution and a rejection

of surrender; 'be the Arab nation in the conscience of jihad' unifies the nation in a single battle, where the self becomes a symbol of all resisting Arab peoples.

The poet unifies the Algerian and Palestinian experiences under the banner of shared Arab struggle, in the face of occupation and injustice, affirming that the fate and the blood are one.

This twinned discourse appears deliberate and purposeful, aimed at keeping hope alive. When the sites of struggle multiply, the chances of victory grow, and a triumph anywhere becomes a catalyst for the awakening of all other fronts.

Ibn al-Shāṭi' succeeded in making that interrelation tangible at the level of the text, not as an external stance, but woven into the very fabric of the poem, through imagery, metaphor, and structure.

Through his poetry, Ibn al-Shāṭi' built a symbolic bridge between Algeria and Palestine, a bridge on which the pains and hopes of peoples intersect, and causes fuse into a single poetic mold. The twinhood in his poetry is not a matter of form but of content, built on a unifying vision that makes liberation a general Arab project, illuminated by Algeria and endured by Palestine, in anticipation of the dream's fulfillment.

5. The Aesthetics of Poetic Commitment

Despite the clarity of the political discourse in Ibn al-Shāṭi's poetry, his work never fell into the trap of flat declaration. He was careful to balance political commitment with poetic beauty, employing symbol, history, and religion in service of his artistic vision.

Jerusalem becomes a symbol of the nation; the martyr becomes a renewed icon; resistance becomes a way of life.

His poetic construction rests on a living rhythm and dense imagery that reflects the heat of suffering and the sincerity of commitment, without the poetry ever losing its artistic sensibility or its depth of meaning.

The poet understood that poetry, to move people, must first win them through beauty. He was deeply aware of the importance of crafting a line, building an image, and the eloquence of expression, even in the darkest political moments. We therefore notice a strong presence of symbol, metaphor, and figurative language, and sometimes even myth, in the construction of the poetic stance.

For instance, the martyr appears in his poetry not as a mere victim, but as a hero, even as a mythical being who is immortalized in the land and resurrects hope.

He writes (Ibn al-Shāṭi', 2009, p. 541):¹⁶

*Each time a martyr embraces eternity,
Longing blossoms in the grandeur of my reckoning.*

The martyr's presence here is rendered through deep symbolic and philosophical layers that transform death into a complete poetic immortality. The verb 'embraces' gives the martyr the quality

of a living, active being, not a body that has ended. An embrace is an act of love and intimacy, so the martyr's meeting with eternity becomes an existential union, not a separation.

Each martyr produces a dynamic movement in the world: longing opens like a flower, while his patient offering of self in hopes of divine reward becomes a towering mountain. The martyr is immortalized through the transformation of his emotions into eternal natural forces, blossoming and mountain.

Martyrdom is not a mere surrender to death but a deliberate, elevated act. 'Grandeur' means a refusal to be broken; 'reckoning' means the offering of one's soul as a conscious gift, not a sacrifice. The martyr here is an honored agent, not a helpless victim. In this way, the poet gives shape to the enduring myth of the martyr: the body dies so that a symbol is born, one that nourishes the land and the memory.

In another verse (Ibn al-Shāṭi', 2009, p. 560):¹⁷

*Between you and me, al-Aqṣā cries out,
And the blood streams down.*

The verse carries both meanings simultaneously. 'The blood streams down' can be read directly as a reference to the blood of martyrs who die defending al-Aqṣā, a real image of the struggle. On the symbolic level, blood serves as a broader emblem of sacrifice, while 'al-Aqṣā cries out' personifies the mosque as a living being that calls and rallies for resistance, making the verse a symbol of struggle in which the martyr is a central and essential part.

Ibn al-Shāṭi' also deploys religious symbols, Jerusalem, al-Aqṣā, martyrs, and epic battles, to give his discourse a spiritual elevation that transforms resistance into a human cause transcending any particular time or place.

Ibn al-Shāṭi' managed to preserve the beauty of poetic discourse despite the weight of commitment. His poem burned with feeling, was rich in image, precise in expressing tragedy, and deep in its vision of freedom. He made resistance poetry a refined artistic form that does not fall short of any other kind of poetry, and sometimes surpasses them all, when it carries the burden of a people and gives voice to them without ever losing its beauty.

Conclusion

Ibn al-Shāṭi''s poetry was a genuine Arab voice through which he expressed the unity of the Arab wound, embodying in his poems a bond of emotional and militant twinhood between Algeria and Palestine, a bond that transcends geographical boundaries to reach the level of collective symbolism and shared fate.

In a time of defeat and division, Ibn al-Shāṭi' offered a poem of resistance, one that does not stop at condemnation, but revives hope and establishes a spiritual unity between peoples, making poetry another front in the battle for liberation.

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Footnotes:

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- ¹Shatat, A. (n.d.). *Biography of the Arab poet Ibn al-Shāṭi‘ (Ismā‘il Ibrāhīm Shatat)*. Retrieved August 9, 2025, from <http://raha.hooxs.com/t3398-topic>
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- ⁴Al-Aṣṭa (2008), p. 9.
- ⁵ Kanafānī, G. (1968). *Al-adab al-Filasṭīnī al-muqāwim taḥt al-iḥtilāl 1948–1968* [Palestinian resistance literature under occupation, 1948–1968] (p. 72). Institute for Palestine Studies.
- ⁶Ibn al-Shāṭi‘. (2009). *Al-majmū‘a ghayr al-kāmila* [The incomplete collection] (Vol. 1, p. 86). Dār al-Awṭān.
- ⁷*Tishrin* is the Arabic word for November, referring specifically to the Algerian November Revolution of 1954.
- ⁸Ibn al-Shāṭi‘ (2009), p. 87.
- ⁹Ibn al-Shāṭi‘ (2009), p. 289.
- ¹⁰Ibn al-Shāṭi‘ (2009), p. 292.
- ¹¹Ibn al-Shāṭi‘ (2009), p. 521.
- ¹²Ibn al-Shāṭi‘ (2009), p. 216.
- ¹³Ibn al-Shāṭi‘ (2009), p. 87.
- ¹⁴Ibn al-Shāṭi‘ (2009), p. 88.
- ¹⁵Ibn al-Shāṭi‘ (2009), p. 89.
- ¹⁶Ibn al-Shāṭi‘ (2009), p. 541.
- ¹⁷Ibn al-Shāṭi‘ (2009), p. 560.